

To: Christine Jerian[christine.jerian@lacity.org]
From: Councilmember Rodriguez
Sent: Fri 2/22/2019 10:21:10 PM
Subject: Fwd: Verdugo Hill Golf Course Project

----- Forwarded message -----

From: [REDACTED]
Date: Tue, Feb 19, 2019 at 10:32 AM
Subject: Verdugo Hill Golf Course Project
To: <Councilmember.Rodriguez@lacity.org>

Dear Ms. Rodriguez,

I was alarmed to learn that there are homeless people who have been able to gain access and occupy the site of the now abandoned Verdugo Hills Golf Course. This information came to light during an appearance by Janek Dombrowa, Architect, for the Snowball West Investments, during his presentation to the Sunland Tujunga Neighborhood Council (STNC) meeting on February 13, 2019. Snowball is the owner and developer of this land parcel. He described the situation as an ongoing problem whereby homeless individuals make entrance by cutting the perimeter fence in order to inhabit the grounds. Apparently, the maintenance contractors, who visit the site every two weeks, discover the trespassers, have them removed, and repair the fence only to have it happen "again and again".

My concern is that Snowball has no understanding of the potential risks this situation poses to the surrounding homes. History is quite clear regarding homeless encampments and their use of poorly supervised warming and cooking fires. These practices seem to be tolerated by city officials but are an illegal and dangerous action by the homeless inhabitants. On its face, these fires may seem innocuous and necessary for those unfortunate souls, but to the homeowners living on the flammable chaparral covered hillsides above the course it presents a frightening and dangerous fire threat.

Vegetation or brush fires that have started under these conditions are all too common throughout the City of Los Angeles. LAFD Valley alarm calls to vegetation fires are an almost daily occurrence during the Summer and Fall months. Many, if not all, are related to irresponsible actions in homeless encampments. Only through the great skill of our fire services are these events prevented from becoming a conflagration. How many times has LAFD been dispatched to a "vegetation fire" in the area of Tujunga Canyon where the encampments have been allowed to proliferate for years? The only reason those events didn't spread devastation to area homes is because Riverwood Ranch is located far enough away and there was luckily no appreciable wind at the time, giving the brush assignment firefighters the ability to get adequate resources on-scene to quell the blaze.

The situation near the old golf course poses a different scenario in that there are many more houses close by, nearly 350, tightly packed in the Elmhurst and Crystal View developments on the hilltop that borders the course. The overgrown brush and neglected litter on the unkempt course provide a direct fire path to the chaparral covered hillsides and canyons that lead straight to the homes. A recipe for disaster. In days past, Los Angeles allowed these houses to be built in a wildland/urban interface area that is now designated to be a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ). Our families live on a powder keg with its fuse leading down the hill to the Snowball property and the matches are being held by the homeless people living there illegally with tacit approval of the owners. As Mr. Dombrowa stated, "we fix the damage to the fence, but they keep coming back". It seems that our new neighbor, Snowball, does not share our collective fear and need for expedience. It's time to get serious.

It doesn't take a wildfire management expert to recognize the devastation that would occur if one of these illegal campfires got out of hand when the Santa Ana wind is blowing strong out of the east. I would guess that in such a circumstance a fire could advance to the doorsteps of this community within mere minutes. Probably in less time than it takes for an LAFD brush response to arrive on-scene. Even if the flame front didn't reach the homes, the firebrands generated by the burning chaparral and lofted onto our homes by the winds would have the impact of an artillery barrage used ahead of an advancing army.

Has a similar fire happened recently inside the City of Los Angeles to support my assertion?

In December 2017, in the Sepulveda pass, a fire was started in the early morning with an eerily similar set of circumstances to what we face. The origin of the fire was a homeless encampment adjacent to the hillside community of homes. The Incident was the Skirball fire. It destroyed 6 houses, burned 422 acres, injured 3 firefighters, and closed the 405 freeway. Had it been a wind-driven event it would have been much worse. Very similar conditions are here or will be soon. The heat of the Summer and the Santa Ana's of the Fall will arrive soon enough.

We need the power of your office to convince the Snowball ownership to take meaningful, effective action. Please have your office contact the owners of the property to demand that they maintain the grounds in such a way as to prevent the homeless encampments. If passive measures are not effective as they themselves revealed, then a 24-hour guard should be posted. Furthermore, they must mitigate all hazardous brush conditions that provides a conduit to spread any fire originating on their property to the brush and thereby homes above. The city ordinance requiring 200' brush clearance from any structure should be amended to include any encampment structure, tent, lean-to, etc., and be part of consideration of the inspection protocol.

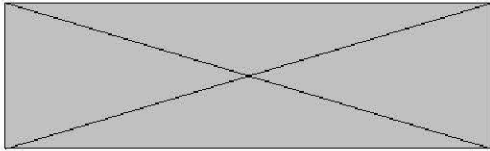
Please show leadership and your concern for the resident's wellbeing on this important matter as soon as possible. Please take urgent action to effect change. Time is of the essence. High temperatures and Santa Ana winds are inevitable and will arrive sooner than we like. Don't let our community become a statistic like those communities that fell victim in the last few years.

Respectfully,



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Sincerely,



Councilwoman Monica Rodriguez, 7th District
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